

November 6, 2013 (/full-blog/2013/11/ag-gag-laws-putting-gag-on-food-safety.html)

"Ag Gag" Laws: Putting a Gag on Food Safety (/full-blog/2013/11/ag-gag-laws-putting-gag-on-food-safety.html)



(<https://static.squarespace.com/static/53fe85a0e4b0516a0c4fed1a/54002444e4b0123f9872f024/54002448e4b0123f9872f096/1409295432785/1000w/>)

Image Source (<http://www.greenisthenewred.com/blog/interview-undercover-investigator-ag-gag-factory-farms/5848/>)

By: Lynsey Freeman, Staff Member

For many Americans, eating meat is a daily occurrence. America represents around five percent of the world's population, but we raise and slaughter "nearly ten billion animals a year, more than fifteen percent of the world's total." [1]

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The substantial quantity of meat processed on our soil raises curiosity and concern from both journalists and animal rights activists. There has been a steady showing of undercover explorations over the years. One particular animal rights group, Mercy For Animals (MFA), sponsors these types of investigations since 2002. [2]

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This type of work sparked the enactment of laws across our nation which make it illegal for anyone to enter an animal facility and use a camera, video camera, or any kind of audio recording device without the consent of the owner. [3]

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Some make it illegal to even be on the property without proper permission.[4]
(file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_edn4)
These laws have come to be known as “ag gag” laws.[5]
(file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_edn5)
They are currently enacted in seven states.[6]
(file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_edn6)

While many of these undercover investigations focus on animal cruelty, that frequently has a direct correlation to food safety. The connection comes from the fact that animal products, such as raw meat and eggs, create legitimate dangers to human health. One danger is salmonella poisoning, a leading cause of foodborne sickness.[7]
(file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_edn7)
Growth hormones, antibiotics, and pesticide and herbicide residues are also potential dangers to meat eaters.[8]
(file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_edn8)
History has shown that the government alone cannot control these dangers. Recently, the government shutdown had all inspections of domestic food, except meat and poultry halted; soon after there was a salmonella outbreak that sickened hundreds of people in eighteen states.[9]
(file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_edn9)
There are many other examples of large-scale outbreaks that the government has not been able to prevent.

“Ag gag” laws are eliminating an essential check on food safety. The public relies on undercover investigations to expose unsafe food production practices in industrial facilities. This is shown through journalistic exposés that have led to landmark laws. For example, Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, led to the enactment of the Federal Meat Inspection Act in 1906.[10]
(file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_edn10)
Animal rights activists have also conducted investigations into organizations, like Sparboe Farms and Butterball, that have resulted in criminal convictions and FDA action.[11]
(file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_edn11)
Therefore, the enactment of these “ag gag” laws should be approached with great concern, because they come with more than a gag on investigators, but also a gag on the safety of the food we consume.

[1] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref1) Mark Bittman, *Rethinking the Meat Guzzler*, N.Y. Times, (Jan. 27, 2008), http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/weekinreview/27bittman.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

[2] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref2) Undercover Investigations: Exposing Animal Abuse, <http://www.mercyforanimals.org/investigations.aspx> (last visited Oct. 15, 2013).

[3] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref3) Animal Research Facility Damage, N.D. Cent. Code Ann. § 12.1-21.1 (West 2013).

[4] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref4) Id.

[5] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref5) Richard A. Oppel Jr., *Taping of Farm Cruelty Is Becoming the Crime* (April 6, 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/us/taping-of-farm-cruelty-is-becoming-the-crime.html?pagewanted=1&_r=3&c.

[6] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref6) Ag Gag, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ag_Gag (last visited Oct. 28, 2013).

[7] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref7) How Safe is Our Meat E. Coli and Salmonella Contamination Dangers, (Jan. 1997), <http://www.motheartnews.com/real-food/e-coli-and-salmonella-contamination-dangers-smar%6dfigoe.aspx?PageId=2&axzzj3CTY98r>.

[8] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref8) Id.

[9] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref9) Ron Nixon, *Risk to Food Safety Seen in Furloughs*, N.Y. Times, (Oct. 9, 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/10/us/politics/risk-to-food-safety-seen-in-furloughs.html?_r=1&c.

[10] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref10) Stephen Wells, *Landmark ‘Ag Gag’ Lawsuit Fights Threat to Freedom of Speech* (July 23, 2013), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-wells/ag-gag-bill_h_3635527.html.

[11] (file:///C:/Users/Jeremy/AppData/Local/Temp/Freeman%20Blog%201%20post%20.docx#_ednref11) Cindy Galli, *Butterball Farm Worker Guilty of Animal Cruelty* (Aug. 28, 2012) <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/butterball-farm-worker-guilty-animal-cruelty/story?id=17098746>; *Investigation: Inside Egg ‘Factory Farm’* (Nov. 18, 2011) <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/video/investigation-inside-egg-factory-farm-animal-rights-group-video-unsanitary-conditions-2020-14987723>.

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